

Success?

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The government of Ngo Dinh Diem in Saigon is facing a lightning coup attempt, and if the regime falls, United States policy will have made progress in the eyes of the administration.

If President Diem and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu are cast aside this will be read generally as the first step in an American effort to eliminate the repressive Diem-Nhu policy which officials feared would undermine the war against the North Vietnam guerrillas. Some 15,000 Americans are in South Vietnam.

Early reports available indicate that the tough palace guard may have been overpowered, that Army elements, the Marines, and the Air Force have joined the revolt. President Kennedy is watching the action closely, having been awakened at 3 a.m. with the first reports and again at dawn. He met with his top military advisers Friday.

In what was termed a "precautionary measure," the United States ordered military forces to move toward the South Vietnam area to protect American lives if necessary.

U.S. Aid Suspended

The United States, meanwhile has temporarily suspended all assistance to the South Vietnamese Government and has ordered Americans to remain off the streets pending further instructions.

There have been no casualties reported among the 3,563 American civilians in South Vietnam, according to a State Department press officer, Richard I. Phillips. There are also a total of 16,500 American military personnel in the country.

Mr. Phillips said that as far as evacuation of the Americans is concerned, there are always contingency plans for taking out Americans in any situation in which they might be in danger.

Officials here say that the Diem-Nhu partnership had done absolutely nothing to improve relations with the United States or to cooperate with American reform ideas since the arrival of Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge.

It is assumed here that the coup attempt is pro-United States. If it succeeds, Mr. Lodge is expected to press for the immediate shipment of a personal palace guard, to the fighting front.

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Aim Suggested

Beyond this the American ambassador probably will ask that early morning "terror" arrests stop forthwith, as well as other brutal aspects of the regime's policy.

Mr. Lodge's aim will also be to have some type of peace agreement with the Buddhist hierarchy signed by any new government. The Americans would welcome an offer by such a government to help rebuild those Buddhist pagodas that were wrecked in August by Diem troops.

What is intriguing is the role of the new American ambassador as this latest aspect of the Saigon drama emerges. Mr. Lodge had planned to report back in person to Washington next weekend.

If the American Government was privy to the coup attempt, which is held to be highly possible, the plans for a Lodge return to the United States can be seen as a cover-up move to signal that the United States was being patient with the present condition in Saigon and that little was afoot.

President Kennedy, officials say, will undoubtedly want Ambassador Lodge to delay his return to Washington and remain in Saigon for at least a short time to follow developments.

Lodge Viewpoint

Mr. Lodge, after a few weeks in Saigon, had decided that the Diem government must go if American policy in Southeast Asia was not to be severely weakened by its tactics.

He felt that the choice for the United States was either to remove President Diem and block communism in Vietnam or find Communist fighting gains mount over the coming year.

Mr. Lodge had been given a free hand by the administration in Saigon. One result was the removal of the able CIA chief John Richardson from Saigon. Looking back, some speculation is now beginning that the Richardson removal was a mistake. The Diem regime while the coup plans ripened.

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